



What is Congestive Heart Failure?

- Congestive heart failure (CHF) does not mean the heart is going to suddenly fail or stop working. CHF occurs when the heart must work harder to pump blood throughout the body. When the heart can't pump blood to the kidneys, they cannot filter extra fluids out of the body and into the urine. This fluid can build up in the lungs and the rest of the body, causing difficult breathing and swelling.
- Children born with certain types of heart problems are at risk for developing CHF. Not all children with heart defects will have CHF.
- CHF occurs gradually. If your child has CHF, you will notice some signs and symptoms that happen over a period of time. The type and number of symptoms are different in each child.

What are symptoms of Congestive Heart Failure?

- **Persistent fast breathing:** If you are caring for a child with CHF, the best time to observe their breathing is while they are sleeping. Children naturally breathe faster when awake or crying.
- **Hard breathing:** You may see muscle pulling or “sucking in” between and below the ribs or the breast bone (retractions). You may see some widening of the nostrils when breathing in, or hear a grunting or wheezing sound with breathing. Some children with CHF may have more trouble breathing when they are lying down.
- **Cough and congestion:** It may be difficult to tell if these symptoms are related to CHF or a respiratory illness. A fever and nose drainage are generally symptoms of a respiratory illness, not congestive heart failure.

- **Changes in skin color:** Look for a grayish, mottled (lacy or net-like patches) color or paleness.
- **Sweatiness:** Look for cool, clammy skin or sweat on the forehead. This may happen when active, feeding or at rest.
- **Decreased amount of urine:** For babies, this may mean they have fewer wet diapers (less than 6-8 a day)
- **Swelling or edema:** Look for puffiness in your child's hands and feet and around their eyes. For adults, puffiness in their legs or feet.
- **Changes in activity:** Look for a decrease in activity, an increase in time spent sleeping or tiring more easily.
- **Feeding difficulties and poor weight gain:** For babies, this may mean taking longer to finish bottles or eating less than usual.
- **Irritability or restlessness**
- **Fatigue**

How is Congestive Heart Failure treated?

Congestive heart failure is treated by finding and removing the cause or by giving medicines to help the heart work more easily. Some common medications that are usually given are:

- **Digoxin:** This drug slows and strengthens the pumping action of the heart.
- **Diuretics:** These drugs help remove extra fluid from the body tissues. Expect to urinate more frequently. Common diuretics used are Lasix[®], Diuril[®] and Aldactone[®].
- **Captopril:** This drug enlarges the blood vessels slightly, lowering the blood pressure and making it easier for the heart to pump blood to the body.

Other things that you can do to help the heart work more easily are:

- Provide quiet areas for rest
- Avoid extreme hot or cold temperatures
- Avoid people who are obviously sick

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